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AN (THE?) EXPLANATION OF THE SOVIET INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN

Robert G. Weinland

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⑬ Robert G. Weinland

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INTRODUCTION*

The sine qua non of an effective response to Soviet actions in Southwest Asia is an accurate definition of the situation there. Their invasion of Afghanistan in December of 1979 is the most recent -- and most visible -- manifestation of the threat those actions can pose. As such, it has been taken by many as the harbinger of things to come, and it obviously has had a major impact on American assessments of the problems that must be dealt with in that region and the steps that should be taken to cope with those problems.

But is it that harbinger? Why did the Soviets invade Afghanistan?

The following represents an attempt to answer both of those questions. The discussion begins with a brief description of the problems facing any analysis of Soviet intentions and the approach to their solution adopted here. Next, the context in which the actions under examination took place is sketched out. The discussion then turns to a review of the course of events in Afghanistan and the role apparently played by the Soviets there. Following this, the motivations judged most likely to have precipitated the invasion are outlined. The discussion concludes with a brief treatment of some of the implications of this conclusion. A listing and evaluation of other, less plausible explanations of the Soviet decision to invade are appended.

REDUCING UNCERTAINTY

We do not know, and are unlikely ever to learn, precisely why the Soviet Union acts as it does. In all likelihood the Soviets themselves do not know, precisely. But they have a pretty good idea.

We obviously have far less information on the origins of their actions than do they, so our understanding of their behavior is clearly going to be far less complete than theirs. We can nevertheless develop explanations and forecasts that are useful. We don't have to operate wholly in the dark; and if we work carefully with what we do know, we can with reasonable confidence make inferences about what we don't know. In the process, we can narrow the range of our uncertainty about their behavior significantly.

But lack of information is not the only source of our uncertainty regarding their actions. Most organizational behavior has a multiplicity of antecedents, only some of which bear a direct

*This paper was written in March-May, 1980. It was reorganized -- without substantive change -- in December 1980. A summary of its argument was presented to an AAASS Conference in November 1980. A distillation of the latter was published in the 30 January, 1981, edition of the Washington Star.

relationship to the achievement of the organization's overall goals. And, since those goals vary not only in importance but also in immediacy, the contribution of each in shaping the organization's actions also varies. A government's ultimate objectives inform, in technical terms "condition," a state's behavior. However, those ultimate objectives do not as a rule play as large a role in determining how the state will act in a given situation as do (a) the immediate context in which that action is to be taken and (b) the government's immediate objectives in that situation.

Immediacy, both of context and of purpose, consequently plays an important role in the explanation developed below. So does sufficiency. Combined, they provide the primary criterion employed in this analysis for evaluating potential explanations of the Soviet's behavior. Developments in Afghanistan and in Soviet-Afghan relations form the immediate context in which the invasion took place; Soviet objectives in Afghanistan represent the most immediate purposes it served. Only if the invasion cannot be explained adequately in those terms -- if that context and those purposes provided insufficient incentives for the Soviets to have acted as they did -- must a wider geopolitical context and more ultimate Soviet purposes be considered.

Taking this approach insures that we are not reading more into Soviet actions than should be read out of them, reducing thereby the level of uncertainty that must be assigned to the explanation that emerges. At the same time, however, we must also insure that we read out of Soviet actions all that is contained in them, that we do not impute to those actions lesser objectives than did the Soviets. This argues for the employment of a second criterion for evaluating potential explanations of their behavior: proportionality.

Did the situation demand more, or less, than the action the Soviets took? Are their imputed objectives and, keeping in mind their general modus operandi, the means they employed to achieve them, in some sort of balance? There are, of course, no objective standards by which to measure this proportionality. Careful reasoning and a firm resolve to avoid imbalance are the only available safeguards. And the answers have to make sense....

CONTEXT

Some introduction to the situation is necessary. The facts of the Soviet invasion are well known. Afghanistan, however, is not. The passages below attempt a brief characterization of those aspects of the country and its history that are of importance to the discussion that follows.

International Politics

Conflict over Afghanistan has a long and involved history, which does not need to be detailed here.¹ Those aspects of the last 150 years of that history that are relevant to this discussion can be summarized in three observations:

- much, perhaps most, of this conflict represented the clash of expanding empires (loosely defined);
- the Afghans resisted vigorously, and for the most part escaped, absorption into those empires; and
- as a result, the outcomes of these conflicts tended to be successive "neutralizations" of Afghanistan -- with the locally stronger of the competing empires having preponderant, although still limited, influence over Afghan affairs.

In the process Afghanistan came to be, and to be regarded as, a buffer between the two most important of those empires: Britain and Russia. And all the participants in the contest, Afghanistan included, came to see its maintaining that buffer status as being in their own interests.

This solution was hammered out near the turn of the century, and it persisted into the 1970s. Britain enjoyed preponderant influence in Afghanistan until it withdrew from South Asia in the late 1940s. In the mid-1950s, after it had become clear that the United States was not going to assume Britain's role in the region, the Soviet Union began to exercise preponderant influence in Afghanistan. Although careful to maintain a balance, the United States did not contest Soviet assumption of that role.²

The Afghans made the most of this situation. They avoided obvious alignment with either bloc (in return for which they received significant development assistance from both); at the same time they also insured that their actions did not run counter to important Soviet interests (in return for which the Soviets by and large left them alone).

Domestic Politics

Conflict within Afghanistan also has a long and involved history.³ Most important here is the fact that domestic politics have contributed significantly to the changes that have taken place over the years in Afghanistan's international posture and policies. Internal conflicts have created occasions for the intervention of forces external to the established political order (some external to Afghanistan itself), and in large part they have also structured the outcomes of those interventions.

Although on almost every dimension Afghanistan is still best characterized as primitive, the last 25 years have witnessed significant progress in its economic development. As has been the case throughout much of the less-industrialized world, however, economic development in Afghanistan has outpaced its political development significantly. It now has some infrastructure and some industries, but it remains a peasant-tribal society, governed more by tradition than by the state.⁴

For much of this century, and until 1973, Afghanistan was in form a constitutional, in substance a more or less absolute, monarchy. The authority of the monarchy, however, was always dependent upon the momentary balance of power between the central government and local political forces. In 1973, Afghanistan became a republic. But control of the government continued to be exercised by members of the former royal family, and the power of the central authority remained limited. In 1978, that oligarchy was replaced by a "dictatorship of the proletariat." There never has been much of (what Marx would recognize as) a proletariat in Afghanistan, however, and at least until 1979, when the rebellion that now grips the country began, the citizenry as such played little if any role in the country's governance. That dictatorship was exercised "on their behalf" by a small, Marxist-Leninist cadre.

As implied in this synopsis, fragmentation has been, and remains, a principal characteristic of the Afghan political system. The central authority has consistently been weak, local forces have consistently been powerful. Thus far, only when some degree of balance existed between the two has the system functioned, and then rarely if ever smoothly or effectively.⁵

There is no mystery behind this. Afghanistan is itself fragmented: geographically, ethnically, linguistically, and culturally. The only forces promoting cohesion have been Islam and external threats, neither of which has ever succeeded in evoking more than a semblance of unity within the country.

THE COURSE OF EVENTS IN AFGHANISTAN AND THE ROLE PLAYED BY THE SOVIETS

The Soviet Union has been deeply involved in Afghanistan for the last 25 years. While there can be no doubt that they would have done so earlier if they had thought the situation warranted it, they appear not to have intervened as such there -- more precisely, not to have intervened in any significant way -- until the 1970s. Exactly when their intervention began is, however, difficult to determine.

It is possible that they played some role in the July 1973 palace revolt that ousted King Mohammad Zahir and led to the establishment of a republic under General Mohammad Daoud.⁶ It is

probable that they played a role in the April 1978 coup d'etat, in which the Daoud regime was replaced by a Marxist-Leninist government under Nur Mohammad Taraki. The only available evidence of direct Soviet participation in those events, however, is circumstantial -- and not convincing.⁷ On the other hand, there is convincing evidence that, (although it could have begun as much as a year before) by the summer of 1979 at the latest, the Soviets were attempting to engineer changes not only in the policies but also in the composition of the Afghan government. They were not responsible for Hafizullah Amin's overthrow of Taraki in September 1979 (on the contrary, they appear to have been working with Taraki to eliminate Amin). But their responsibility for and direct role in the December 1979 coup de main against the Amin government and its replacement by a "popular front" government led by Babrak Karmal are not open to question.

At some point, Soviet activity in Afghanistan crossed the dividing line between involvement and intervention.* Precisely when this occurred, and why, are not entirely clear. It could have taken place before April 1978. It is certain, however, that it occurred well before December 1979. That fact, coupled with developments in Afghanistan itself, goes a long way toward explaining why the Soviets eventually pursued their intervention to its logical conclusion: the invasion and occupation of the country. A review of those developments is consequently in order.

1953-73: King Zahir and Prime Minister Daoud⁸

King Mohammad Zahir came to the Afghan throne in 1933. He held it until 1973.

For the first 20 years of that period, the powers of government were exercised by an informal regency of his uncles. In 1953, in the wake of a palace revolt, Zahir took over from the regency. General Mohammad Daoud, who was the King's cousin and brother-in-law, and had played a major role in those events, became Prime Minister. Daoud proved to be a strong figure, who for the better part of the next decade ran the country more or less by himself. Major disagreements over both his foreign and his domestic policies quickly arose. Their persistence eventually eroded the bases of his political support within the country. By 1963, it was clear that he could no longer govern effectively and he left the Prime Ministership.⁹ The King, acting through a succession of notably weaker figures, subsequently governed himself.

*Intervention is defined here (very loosely) as (authoritative and intrusive) direct participation in the workings of another state's political system.

In July of 1973, Daoud engineered a second palace revolt, declared a Republic, and had himself installed as its President.¹⁰ The King abdicated.

Daoud's return to power was a source of apprehension both in Afghanistan and abroad. Some feared that the local controversies and conflicts that had developed during his Prime Ministership would be resurrected, in particular the question of "autonomy" for the Pashtun people of Northwest Pakistan.¹¹ Others were concerned about a potential renaissance of Soviet influence in Afghanistan. Those apprehensions were well-founded.

There were significant differences between the policies that had been followed by the King's governments in the decade after 1963 and those that had characterized the Daoud regime of the decade before. Their objectives were similar, but the means they had employed in the pursuit of those objectives differed markedly.

Internally, Daoud had been a "modernizer." The King, while not opposed to economic development, had attempted to limit its pace in order to avoid social, and ultimately political, destabilization. Daoud's preferred solution to the latter problem was known to be the development of a strong central authority, based on a strong military, with political mobilization confined within the framework of a single party. The King, on the other hand, favored modifying the country's traditional political institutions to function more like those of a democracy.

Externally, where the King's foreign policy had been essentially passive, Daoud had shown himself to be an activist. It was, after all, Daoud who had exploited Afghanistan's international buffer status to involve the blocs in its economic development -- in essence, inviting the Soviet Union (and thereby "forcing" the United States) to fight the Cold War economically in Afghanistan.¹² It was also Daoud who had allowed the Soviets to build, and in the process gain significant influence over, Afghanistan's military establishment. And it was the King who, while acceding to continued U.S. and Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, had attempted to balance the superpowers' activities -- in the process holding the Soviets increasingly at arm's length.

1973-78: President Daoud

Daoud did not do much of what it had been feared he might when he took power. In certain areas he the opposite. In others he did nothing.

In one respect, however, he acted true to form. Under his Presidency, Afghanistan was transformed into a dictatorship, supported by and exercised through the military.

Daoud had come to power with the assistance of the military -- largely junior officers, most of whom (like the majority of the junior members of the Afghan officer corps) had been trained in the Soviet Union, and most of whom were leftist in political orientation. In classical fashion, one of his first actions was to reward the makers of the palace revolt by giving them control of the military. In equally classical fashion, as he moved subsequently to consolidate his position, he reorganized the military to put its control in more reliable hands. In the process, he made new and eventually quite dangerous enemies.

Daoud energized old and made new enemies in other quarters as well. Coming after the limited democratization carried out by the king, Daoud's imposition of a military dictatorship alienated many of the country's newly-mobilized political forces. The king had already acted to restrain that mobilization. Daoud attempted to channel it into a single, controllable national political party, at the same time actively suppressing those elements unwilling to be coopted in this way. In the process, Khalq, Parcham and the other factions of the Afghan Marxist movement were driven underground. Unable to work toward the realization of their objectives "legitimately," the Marxists, Khalq in particular, began to work "illegitimately," by recruiting disaffected elements of the military to their cause.

In the course of his five years as President, Daoud managed to alienate not only the military and the left but also the right. He accomplished the former by being insufficiently progressive; he accomplished the latter by being too progressive -- in essence, attempting, at times by force, to get Afghanistan's more or less medieval Eastern society to adopt modern Western ways. Improved rights for women was one of the most divisive issues. Those efforts, especially where the military were involved, proved counterproductive, alienating peripheral political forces, primarily tribal and traditionalist, that otherwise might have supported him.

Daoud also appears to have alienated the Soviets, less by the character of his domestic policies than by the directions in which he eventually moved in the international arena. When his Presidency began, he appeared to be adopting the pro-Soviet stance many feared would characterize his foreign policy: supporting the Soviet's campaign for establishment of an Asian collective security system and at least threatening continuation of border-related disputes with then strongly anti-Soviet Iran and Pakistan.¹³ By the time he was overthrown, that appearance had been replaced by a quite different reality: Afghanistan's dispute with Iran had been settled; Daoud had reached preliminary agreement, first with Bhutto and then with Zia, concerning both the Pashtun and the Baluchi separatist problems; he had solicited, and received offers of, economic and other development assistance from Iran, Saudi

Arabia, Iraq, and other Gulf states; and he was beginning to play an activist role in the non-aligned movement, adopting a Tito-like position and directly opposing Cuban efforts to control the movement.¹⁴

Daoud clearly was attempting to do essentially what the king had done: hold the Soviets increasingly at arm's length, without in the process altering the fundamental Afghan-Soviet relationship. This in large part explains his search for political accommodation with, and economic support from, the regional powers. The onset of detente between the superpowers also contributed to his turn toward the country's other neighbors. U.S.-Soviet economic competition in Afghanistan, which until the early 1970s had fueled the country's halting steps toward modernity, was losing momentum, and in order to find the resources necessary to prevent the development process from stagnating, Daoud was forced to turn to the new wealth in the Gulf.

The Soviets cannot have viewed this change of course with equanimity. Indeed, they reenergized their economic assistance program, extending a \$437 million credit to Afghanistan in 1975 to permit commodity and capital goods imports. By 1977, Soviet-Afghan trade turnover was two and one half times what it had been in 1973 (\$250 million as opposed to \$100 million).¹⁵

Daoud, however, for whatever reason, was not swayed. When he was overthrown, he had just returned from a trip to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Egypt,* and arrangements were reportedly being made for him to conduct a state visit to Washington.¹⁶

April 1978¹⁷

The April 1978 coup that swept President Daoud out of office and into the grave has been characterized as "accidental."¹⁸ That characterization can be considered appropriate, as long as three important elements in the situation are kept in mind: Daoud's regime was vulnerable to just such action, the chain of events that led to its downfall was to a certain extent fortuitous, but if those events had not occurred an equally suitable occasion for his overthrow probably would have presented itself before long. The Marxists probably were not the only ones preparing a coup.¹⁹

Daoud had alienated a variety of potentially powerful domestic political forces -- leftists, religious and other conservatives, even political moderates -- without establishing offsetting relationships elsewhere in the system. Essentially the same situation prevailed in foreign affairs. He had isolated himself po-

*Visiting Egypt after President Sadat's November 1977 trip to Jerusalem cannot have pleased the Soviets.

litically. In the process, he had increased his already critical dependence on Afghanistan's obviously undependable military and opened the stability of his regime to question. As implied by this analysis, and demonstrated by the events to be described immediately below, Daoud had lost his ability to govern. The central authority had become hesitant to act, and ineffective when it did act; other forces began to capture the initiative.

The chain of events that led directly to the 1978 coup began on April 17th, with the assassination (by party or parties unknown) of Mir Akbar Khyber, the theoretician of the Parcham faction of the Afghan Marxist movement. His funeral was held on the 19th. A central feature of that event was a procession through downtown Kabul, more accurately a protest march, conducted by some 10-20,000 demonstrators.

This march provided the first real indication of the Marxists' strength, and the government reacted to it -- albeit belatedly -- by arresting the movement's leadership. Those arrests began on April 24. They escalated significantly on the 26th. The majority of the individuals who were to play prominent roles in the subsequent Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) regime were taken prisoner in this operation.

The coup began on the 27th, reportedly on instruction from the imprisoned PDPA leadership.²⁰ It was carried out by air and armored forces stationed in and near Kabul. The presidential guard resisted vigorously, but was eventually overwhelmed. By the evening of the 28th, the fighting was over. Daoud, his immediate family, and the principals in his government were dead; the PDPA leadership had been freed from prison; and the military had set up a Revolutionary Council to rule the country.

The officers who initiated the coup apparently included some of the same individuals who had played leading roles in bringing Daoud to power in 1973.²¹ Who made the coup a success, however, in particular who flew the decisive air strikes against the strongholds occupied by the presidential guard, is not clear. Allegations of direct Soviet participation in those strikes have been made, but not substantiated.²²

The second major unknown with regard to the coup is how the distribution of its spoils was effected. As indicated, the powers of government were taken up first by a group calling itself the Revolutionary Military Council of the National Armed Forces of Afghanistan, in whose name an announcement of the fundamental principles of the domestic and foreign policies of the new regime -- Islamic, democratic, neutralist -- was made on the day following the coup.²³ Within 24 hours, however, a new Revolutionary Council of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA), composed of the leadership of the Marxist movement and the military leaders

of the coup, and speaking far more ideologically, had supplanted it.²⁴

1978-79: PDP and the DRA

The "Party"

Like many things in and concerning Afghanistan, the origins, composition, and activities of the Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan remain obscure. Little is known about its pre-revolutionary existence, and much of what has come to light is of questionable reliability.²⁵

In the mid 1960s, during the king's abortive attempt to democratize Afghanistan, an element of press freedom had been established. This freedom was even extended to the Marxist movement, various factions of which began to publish newspapers. The two most prominent of these were Khalq ("masses"/"people"), published by Nur Mohammad Taraki, and Parcham ("flag"/"banner"), produced by a group led by Babrak Karmal. These papers were soon suppressed.

The organizations behind them* also were suppressed, but even though forced to operate underground they managed to develop enough structure and momentum to acquire and direct significant followings, and to carry on their anti-regime activities. Although sharing the same fundamental Marxist-Leninist ideology, the two principal factions, and for that matter the other, far weaker splinter groups that made up the remainder of the movement, devoted no less of their effort to internecine warfare than they did to the revolution -- perhaps more.

This factionalism apparently had two sources: programmatic differences and personality clashes, with the latter generally being assigned the paramount role by informed observers. Parcham appears to have adopted the more orthodox posture, maintaining contact with the Soviet embassy and following closely the policy line emanating from Moscow.²⁶ Khalq appears to have advocated more radical policies.²⁷ The extreme left wing of the movement was inhabited by Maoist-oriented splinter groups.²⁸

Few details of the non-programmatic differences fueling this factional strife have come to light. Some probably reflected the differing ethnic and social origins of the factions. The Khalq, while largely Pushtun, included significant numbers from other ethnic groups. Most came from rural areas. Many had been educated. The Parchami, on the other hand, were almost exclusively Pushtun and members of the urban elite. Some of the latter were even reputed to have links with the royal family.²⁹

*There were no political parties as such in Afghanistan.

Personal rivalry probably accounted for most of the conflict. Taraki, the acknowledged founder of the PDPA and head of Khalq, was a noted author of short stories and much more a visionary than a practical leader.³⁰ His deputy, and successor, Hafizullah Amin, was his complementary opposite: an energetic, manipulative, "organization man."³¹ The leader of Parcham, Karmal, a well known anti-monarchist politician and an orator of renown, appears to have shared characteristics of both.³² Parcham's theoretician, Khyber, and the other members of the PDPA remain shadowy figures.

As indicated in the introductory discussion, fragmentation has long been a principal characteristic of Afghan politics. It dominated the PDPA's existence when it was on the fringe of the political system, and it continued to characterize its activities when it captured the center of that system.

Power Struggles

Apparently as the result of Soviet intervention, Khalq and Parcham agreed in the spring of 1977 to sublimate their internecine warfare, form a united front, and concentrate their attention on the struggle against Daoud.³³ This united front was maintained through the April 1978 coup.

When the PDPA took office, power was shared between Khalq and Parcham. Taraki became Chief of State and Head of Government of the DRA. Amin, the deputy leader of Khalq, and Karmal, the leader of Parcham, shared the position of Deputy Head of Government. Although Khalq was the larger by far of the two factions, the remaining cabinet positions were divided almost equally between Khalqi and Parchami.³⁴

That this "unification" of the PDPA had been more apparent than real soon became obvious. By the end of July 1978 it had collapsed, although the process of its disintegration undoubtedly began before that (probably even before mid-June, when the Revolutionary Council was reorganized).

The issues that redivided Khalq and Parcham did not become public, but, in addition to the disagreements that had produced their previous conflict, differences over the specific policies to be adopted by the DRA and the manner in which the government's programs would be implemented probably played a major role, as did the ultimate political question of who was to govern.* While its sources remained hidden, the outcome of the struggle was clear for all to see: Parcham lost, decisively. Karmal and the other lead-

*It is conceivable that the role the Soviet Union would play in the implementation of the Afghan revolution was also a point of contention.

ing figures of Parcham were exiled (Karmal was made ambassador to Czechoslovakia) and less-prominent Parchami in the government and military disappeared.*

The next to go were the military. In August of 1978, the by now wholly Khalqi government "discoverd" a "counterrevolutionary plot" being prepared on behalf of the recently-exiled Parchami by participants in the April coup, and the the latter also disappeared from view.³⁵ The military received new and presumably more reliable leaders.

As a result, by September of 1978 Khalq was firmly in control. It dominated the party, it dominated the government, and it had the allegiance of the military leadership.

The stage was thus set for a second struggle. This took place within Khalq itself, between Amin and Taraki, and appears to have had little to do with ideological or policy questions. It was in all probability nothing more nor less than a straightforward contest for personal power.³⁶

When this power struggle began is not clear. Amin's ambition obviously drove it, so -- although suppressed by the exigencies of the situation prior to Khalq's acquisition and consolidation of control -- it is likely to have been a matter of long standing. The initial manifestations of struggle became apparent in March of 1979. It seems to have intensified in July of that year; and it culminated in September, with Amin replacing Taraki as Head of State.

At each stage in this struggle, Amin would engineer an organizational change that increased his ability to engineer subsequent changes: Taraki would be elevated to a more prominent position or be given a more impressive title, Amin would gain more operational control. In March of 1979, Taraki, already Chief of State and the leader of the party, traded in his supplementary portfolio as Defense Minister for the title of Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. Amin, on the other hand, replaced Taraki as Head of Government (he had been Deputy Head since Karmal's departure).** He also gained control of the secret police.*** In

*Some were killed. Most, however, appear merely to have been imprisoned.

**Some of these changes may have been foreshadowed in the September-October 1978 reorganizations that accompanied the Khalq's consolidation of power.

***By putting a relative in charge.

July, Amin increased his span of control by taking over the functions -- although not the title --- of Defense Minister.³⁷ Each of these changes in the status of the principals to the struggle was reflected in a shuffle in the positions occupied by their followers.

Five such governmental reorganizations occurred between July of 1978 and July of 1979. The two potentially most important changes have been referred to; the intricacies of the remainder defy description, not to mention analysis, here. There is every reason to believe, however, that their dissection would only reinforce the point made above: after March of 1979 Taraki was being "kicked" -- albeit incrementally -- "upstairs."

In September of 1979 he was kicked out. Amin won that contest and took its prize. Now he had to turn his attention to a third power struggle. This time, although the stakes (for him) were the same, he was pitted against a far more formidable opponent: the Soviet Union.³⁸

The struggle between Hafizullah Amin and the Soviet Union for control of Afghanistan began, as implied above, even before Amin formally assumed the leader's position. He had dominated the government at least since March of 1979, and his grip on the country was increasing noticeably.³⁹ Soviet antipathy to him seems to have developed in parallel with his acquisition of power.

The Soviets clearly did not think much of Hafizullah Amin. They considered the Khalqi plan for the implementation of the revolution in Afghanistan to be potentially counterproductive: attempting to change too much too rapidly was liable to stimulate too much opposition. They also considered Khalqi politics to be potentially counterproductive: internal power struggles, and the purges that accompanied them, were liable to make the regime less rather than more secure, eroding potential support for the revolution within the populace and thinning dangerously the ranks of the cadres available to implement it.⁴⁰ Amin shared responsibility with Taraki for the former "error," but he was clearly the prime mover in the increasingly self-destructive conflict now convulsing the Khalq. And the Soviets could not control him.

Soviet intervention against Amin probably began covertly, perhaps as early as April of 1979 when General Yepishev, the chief political officer (and, hence, chief management consultant) of the Soviet military, visited Afghanistan.⁴¹ It escalated rapidly in the second half of 1979. Soviet efforts to change the course of the Khalq regime -- slow down the implementation of the revolution, expand the circle of leadership, and form a united front with other "progressive forces" in the country -- had by August become overt. Soviet media were proffering "advice" to the PDPA,

and Soviet embassy officers were openly canvassing the country for candidates to replace its Khalqi leadership.⁴²

There are indications that, in early September, the Soviets, fully aware of the origins of this struggle and the impact it was having on the revolution, urged Taraki to eliminate Amin. Taraki apparently attempted it. If so, the operation backfired. Amin eliminated Taraki.⁴³

From the Soviet point of view, that meant Hafizullah Amin was even further out of control. However fictional Taraki's leadership role might have been, it had served as a check on Amin's imprudence. As Amin's purge of his late opponent's followers and his own detractors both inside and outside the Khalq gathered momentum, and the ranks of the "progressive forces" of Afghanistan dwindled still further, the prospects for the PDPA's survival -- and, by implication, the survival of the DRA itself -- dimmed. As those prospects became darker, the incentives for the Soviets to escalate their intervention against Amin increased.⁴⁴

At some point, most likely in October, after the return of General Pavlovsky (the Commander-in-Chief of Soviet Ground Forces, who had been in Afghanistan since August ostensibly to assess the progress of the regime's counterinsurgency efforts), the Soviets obviously decided that the incentives for them to intervene had grown to the point where drastic action was justified: a "final solution" to the Hafizullah Amin problem.⁴⁵ When that decision was reached, although it took another month or so for events to run their course, Amin lost his third -- and for him conclusive -- power struggle.

Revolution and Rebellion

The revolution that the PDPA attempted to implement in Afghanistan was in essence "Socialist."* For their own separate purposes, however, the government of the DRA remained hesitant to admit that fact, and the Soviets (with one as yet unexplained exception) refrained from granting it official recognition as such.

The DRA's reluctance had eminently practical origins and is readily explicable. It is no secret that Communism, even when labeled "Socialism," has a bad name in the Islamic world. It is considered atheistic, and hence anathema. Admission of the revolution's "Socialist" character obviously would generate more resistance, both within Afghanistan's overwhelmingly Islamic popula-

*What is, and is not, "Socialist" can be debated ad nauseam. As this discussion attempts to make clear, such judgments are inevitably political. There are no objective standards.

tion and among its Islamic neighbors, than was likely to arise if that admission were withheld.⁴⁶

Soviet restraint had more complex, but no less practical, origins. Two criteria appear to govern admission to the Socialist Commonwealth, the portals to which are guarded by the Soviet Union.⁴⁷ One is clearly some minimum of ideological orthodoxy. The other appears to be the long-term prospects for the success of the revolution in question. Since the Soviet Union is obligated to defend the achievements of those revolutions it acknowledges to be "Socialist," and is fearful of over-extending its security commitments, it is usually careful about making such acknowledgements.⁴⁸ The Soviets obviously considered the prospects for the success of the PDPA's revolution to be questionable -- especially after its leadership was captured first by Khalq and then by Amin, and widespread resistance to the revolution emerged within the population.

Had the Soviets not intervened to save the Afghan revolution, the absence of that acknowledgement probably would have had real significance, justifying their inaction. But they did intervene, and for that purpose.

Labels consequently appear to have played a less important role in this situation than objective facts. Although reluctant to admit on the open record that the DRA was attempting to implement a "Socialist" revolution, both the Afghan and Soviet governments knew full well that this was, in fact, what was being done. And both acted accordingly. While it was the product of a "home-grown" version of Marxist-Leninist ideology, and vulnerable to the charge of "left extremism," the Khalqi program that came to drive the PDPA's revolution clearly met minimum "Socialist" criteria: a workers party leading the revolution, radical political reorganization enabling that party to effect, and insure, the country's fundamental socio-economic transformation (in the "Socialist" direction), and the establishment of national political and economic independence (from the capitalist/imperialist West).⁴⁹

Radical reorganization and fundamental transformation certainly describe what Khalq set out to effect in Afghanistan -- especially as viewed by most Afghans. Not having participated previously in the national political process, the majority of the Afghan population was not directly affected by the PDPA's radical reorganization of the political system. They were, however, affected directly, and significantly, by the fundamental socio-economic transformations that this political reorganization brought with it.

Roughly 90 percent of the population of Afghanistan (13.8 of the 15.5 million total according to a 1979 census, Afghanistan's first) is rural or nomadic.⁵⁰ This overwhelming majority had been

largely untouched by what modernization had taken place in the country since the mid-1950s. It remained a peasant-tribal society, organized along traditional lines and governed by traditional, largely Islamic, values.

The Khalq set out to transform that society -- rapidly.⁵¹ Its declared objective, "eliminating the exploitation of man by man," was popular. Its use of revolutionary violence to accomplish that objective was not. The impact of its attempt to accomplish its ends by those means was disastrous.

Three decrees of the Revolutionary Council (RC) provoked the most contention. Decree No. 6, promulgated in July 1978, canceled most debts and abolished the rural economy's traditional banking system, in which mortgages granted by local landowners and moneylenders supplied seed money for small farmers. It did not, however, create an effective alternative to that system. Decree No. 7, promulgated in October 1978, established equal rights for women and gave them access to education. It also outlawed dowries (more accurately, bride sales). Decree No. 8, promulgated in November 1978, instituted a thoroughgoing land redistribution scheme, which began to be implemented the following January.⁵² A previous RC decree had changed the national flag from Islamic green to Socialist red, and upset some of the more sensitive Muslim traditionalists.⁵³ But these three undertakings represented a direct attack on core values -- cultural and religious as well as economic -- of Afghan society.⁵⁴ And they unleashed the rebellion that continues in the country today.

Violence has been commonplace in Afghanistan, a way of life. So has resistance to government. Even the combination of the two had a long history, which as a matter of course carried over into the DRA era. Any central authority in Afghanistan could have expected violent resistance to its attempts to extend and exercise control over the country.⁵⁵ In much the same vein, any Afghan government that gave evidence of a "Socialist" orientation was liable to encounter an additional layer of resistance, the product of Islam's rejection of "Godless Communism."

Neither of these factors accounts adequately for the eventual scope and intensity of the rebellion that developed in Afghanistan. Nor does a third factor that deserves more than passing mention: "spillover" from the Shia revolution across the border in Iran.

Evidence suggests that the Iranian revolution did penetrate Afghanistan, but its impact appears to have been transitory and localized. It seems to have served as one of the principal stimuli to the March 1979 revolt in Herat, the only major Afghan city in proximity to the Iranian border and the center of the country's minority (20 percent) Shia population.⁵⁶ The Herat revolt created

shockwaves both in Afghanistan (the garrison had mutinied, casting suspicion once again on the reliability of the Afghan military*) and in the Soviet Union (Soviet advisors were a principal target of the violence in Herat).⁵⁷ It also appears to have had a major impact both on the struggle between Amin and Taraki for control of the Khalq (Taraki's first apparent "kick upstairs" occurred in the immediate aftermath of the revolt) and on Soviet estimates of the prospects for the successful implementation of the Afghan revolution (General Yepishev arrived just after Taraki had received that "promotion"). But the orgy of destruction that characterized the Herat revolt appears not to have been repeated elsewhere in Afghanistan -- at least in that manner.

The rebellion that spread countrywide was not only far less frenzied, more deliberate, than the events at Herat, it also appears to have begun in earnest well before the Herat incident occurred.⁵⁸ Were some composite empirical picture of the rebellion available, it would most likely show that, while violent resistance to the central government began long before the RC's promulgation of those three central decrees, it was those decrees that stimulated the significant, and continuing, increase in scope and intensity that came to characterize the conflict.

The continuing escalation of the rebellion posed a major threat to the survival of the DRA itself. The Khalqi attempt to reorder the structure of Afghan society, and to do so at a revolutionary rather than an evolutionary pace, caused widespread disaffection in the populace. That disaffection threatened the successful construction of a "Socialist" society. The Khalqi use of revolutionary -- backed up by military -- violence to overcome this disaffection in the citizenry caused widespread disaffection in the military, which was drawn from the very population against which it was being sent.⁵⁹ The disaffection of the military reduced the regime's ability to cope with the disaffection of the citizenry. A vicious circle had been created.

Soviet Involvement

The Soviets participated actively in the implementation of the Afghan revolution. Their involvement appears to have been intended primarily to insure the success -- or, at least the "irreversibility" -- of the revolution, and to have been focused on breaking the vicious circle that was threatening its future.

There had been Soviet advisors in Afghanistan before the April 1978 coup.⁶⁰ Between April of 1978 and December of 1979,

*That this suspicion was well founded was demonstrated the next month when the garrison at Jalalabad also mutinied.

however, their numbers grew significantly, reaching a possible high of some 5,000: 3,000 civilian and 2,000 military.⁶¹ After the coup, they became not only more numerous but also more active.

Soviet civilian advisors carried out two functions. One group -- composed of technicians, educators, construction crews and the like -- provided normal development assistance services. The others joined the Khalq in the government. Soviets permeated every governmental organ of the DRA, participating directly in the formulation of its policies and the execution of its programs, including those implementing the revolution.⁶²

Soviet military advisors permeated the Afghan military establishment just as thoroughly. Some, like their civilian counterparts, were there to provide ordinary military-technical assistance. Others, however, were integrated directly into the Afghan command structure, not just in a staff capacity but exercising operational control of Afghan military units. This was especially true of those units being employed against the rebels.⁶³

Soviet involvement in the defense of the revolution and its gains took a number of directions. In the civilian sector, the efforts of Soviet advisors working within the government were focused on moderating Khalqi behavior. One of their objectives was, essentially, a repackaging of the Khalq's revolutionary programs to enhance their overall acceptability and reduce the alienation of the population. Another was to make the new economic system function effectively.

In the military sector, Soviet attention was focused on insuring the success of the Khalq's efforts to suppress the rebellion. This entailed not only enhancing the military effectiveness of its counterinsurgency operations, but improving the political reliability of the forces conducting those operations. The integration of Soviet officers into the Afghan command structure served both ends.

The effectiveness of Soviet involvement in the implementation and defense of the Afghan revolution cannot be assessed reliably. It had an obvious element of counterproductivity, in many instances increasing the estrangement it was intended to counter.⁶⁴ On balance, however, the Soviets probably helped the DRA push disaster further into the future than it could have done on its own.

However, Soviet participation -- more accurately, intervention -- in the revolutionary process in Afghanistan had another and in the long-run even more important result. It made the Soviet Union responsible, along with the Khalq, for the outcome of that process -- for the success or failure of the revolution, and, should the revolution fail, for the consequences of that failure.

But Soviet responsibility for what happened in Afghanistan was neither wholly implicit nor confined to the question of the success of the revolution. In December 1978 the two countries had signed a Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation.⁶⁵ This is one of ten such agreements the Soviets have concluded with Third World countries since 1971.*

Article four of this Treaty commits each country to act to ensure the "security, independence and territorial integrity" of the other. It also commits both to cooperate in their efforts to strengthen their respective defense capabilities.

There was then an explicit Soviet commitment to act in support of Afghanistan. But the thrust of that commitment was to defend the state against its external enemies, not the government against its citizenry. The Soviets were also committed -- albeit implicitly -- to employ military means where appropriate in rendering that support.

This went beyond the commitments they had made to their Third World treaty partners, most likely a reflection of Afghanistan's unique status as an immediate neighbor of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the commitment the Soviets made to Afghanistan did not go as far as that given to Mongolia, the only other immediate Soviet neighbor in a position analogous to that of Afghanistan.⁶⁶ But Afghanistan, unlike Mongolia, was not an acknowledged member of the Socialist Commonwealth.

The Soviets consequently were not obligated in any formal way to act in defense of the Afghan revolution. But they did. The targets of their intervention were the principal domestic threats to the revolution: Hafizullah Amin and the rebellion. That the Soviets acted thusly, in spite of rather than because of the Treaty, highlights still further the responsibility for the revolution's outcome that proved to be a concomitant of their participation in its implementation.

THE MOST PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATION OF THE SOVIET INVASION

Soviet intervention in Afghanistan is best characterized as a process rather than an event. That process clearly had its beginning in a policy decision that could only have been taken at the highest level of the Soviet leadership: that the payoff from assuming a direct role in the Afghan political system (in other words, intervening) was likely to outweigh the payoff from contin-

*The number would be eleven if Vietnam had not left the ranks of the Third World to become a member of the Socialist Commonwealth.

uing to abstain from such activity.* This decision could have been reached as early as the spring of 1977. It was certainly taken no later than April 1978. Subsequent Soviet actions in Afghanistan, including their December 1979 invasion, merely articulated and implemented this policy. Its fundamental thrust remained unchanged.

The initial step in that process probably had been taken by the time of the April 1978 coup. As indicated above, there is no convincing evidence of active, direct Soviet participation in the coup. There is, on the other hand, evidence of indirect Soviet involvement: pressure reportedly applied to the disparate factions of the Afghan Marxist movement in 1977, in particular Khalq and Parcham, to stop their internecine warfare, unite, and concentrate their energies on the struggle against Daoud. And, given the linkages known to exist between the Parchami leadership and the Soviets, it is difficult to conceive of events having proceeded as they did in April 1978 without the Soviets already having indicated, if only tacitly, their approval of the "reunited" PDPA's assumption of power.

But the April 1978 coup per se was of minor importance. The regime that it removed from office -- itself the product of the July 1973 coup -- was no more legitimate than the regime it brought to office. Moreover, both coups were carried out by essentially the same group of military officers.

What gave the events of April 1978 their importance was what was done with the governmental powers seized in the coup. In 1973, those powers had merely been transferred, within the existing political system, from one element of the ruling oligarchy to another. The form of government changed more significantly than its substance. In 1978, on the other hand, the powers of government were transferred (with at the minimum Soviet concurrence) to a group that then stood outside Afghanistan's domestic political system, that was (at least at the outset) under the influence of the Soviet Union, and that (with direct Soviet assistance) subsequently employed those powers to transform the country's political, social and economic systems radically -- in essence, to carry out a "Socialist" revolution.

Whatever the role they may have played in the 1978 coup, there is no doubt that the Soviets participated actively and directly in the revolution that followed it. And it was continuing Soviet participation in the implementation of the Afghan revolu-

*That a specific decision such as this was taken is an inference, based on the change in Soviet policy regarding Afghanistan. As will be noted below, however, that change could have been a reflection of a more fundamental shift in Soviet foreign policy -- affecting far more than their actions in Afghanistan.

tion, the growing resistance within the populace to the social and economic changes brought on by the revolution, and the consequent prospect of the revolution's imminent failure, that appear to have been primarily responsible for their invasion and subsequent occupation of the country.

Increasing Soviet involvement in the revolution increased their stake in its outcome; the greater their stake in the outcome, the greater the incentives for them to participate in the process. Those incentives grew as Soviet confidence in the ability of Hafizullah Amin and the Khalq to achieve their objectives without assistance decreased, and as Soviet fear that the failure of the revolution would lead to the installation of a reactionary government in Afghanistan increased. And both were magnified by their constant apprehension that such developments would have significant, adverse consequences for the Soviet Union itself. The revolution had to be defended.

It probably appeared to the Soviets at the time of their decision to invade, that if they did not act to alter the situation the following sequence of events might well occur in Afghanistan:*

- the collapse of the Hafizullah Amin regime,
- anarchy,
- the replacement of the Khalqi government by a nationalist -- and in all probability both socio-economically and politically reactionary -- government,
- in the process, the elimination of whatever elements of the "progressive forces" of Afghanistan had survived Hafizullah Amin, and
- as a result of the change of governments, an invitation to the West to assist in the restoration and maintenance of order there.

Had events run that course, the Soviet Union would have suffered a significant setback, especially if such an outcome were compared with the situation that had prevailed before April 1978.⁶⁷

The Soviets faced two more or less distinct families of adverse consequences. One encompassed events on their southern borders, to which they have over the years stated repeatedly and

*The evidence that they actually held these views at that time is circumstantial. This argument is derived from the logic of the situation and the course taken by events. Subsequent Soviet commentaries do, however, support this argument.

authoritatively that they "cannot remain indifferent." Rebellion, escalating in violence and expanding in scope, would fit that description. So would the replacement of a "friendly" by an "unfriendly" government. Both were conceivable. The second family of adverse consequences had less to do with the geographical location of Afghanistan than with the orientation of its government: "progressive" if not strictly "Socialist." Soviet political influence in the Third World is to a significant degree based on their willingness and ability to support the "forces of progressive change" and defend their "achievements." In other circumstances, in South America for example, where distance clearly would have limited their ability to defend "progressive changes," Soviet failure to act would not have put their motives in question. In this case, however, where their ability to act was unquestioned (and unchallenged), inaction would have threatened (perhaps destroyed) their image as the "bulwark of the forces of peace and progress."

It is difficult to say which of these considerations caused greater concern in the Kremlin. Either could have given them sufficient incentive to act. Both probably played a role.

The decision that began the process of Soviet intervention clearly hinged on the prospect of acquiring increased profit from a fundamental change in their policy toward Afghanistan. The decision that carried that process to its logical, and under the circumstances "inevitable," conclusion, just as clearly hinged on the prospect of avoiding unacceptable loss from the prosecution of that policy.

IMPLICATIONS OF THAT CONCLUSION

If that is why the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, what are they likely to do now? What light does the invasion throw on the character of contemporary Soviet behavior?

First, if the foregoing analysis is correct and the invasion was a concluding step in an interventionary process that had been underway for some 20 months at the very least, then its value as a general predictor of Soviet behavior -- as the harbinger of things to come in Southwest Asia (or for that matter anywhere else along the periphery of the Soviet Union) -- is minimal. Far greater predictive value is liable to be found in the factors that precipitated the initial step in the Soviet intervention, in the events of April 1978 rather than those of December 1979. Why the Soviets traded in a neutralist buffer, with which they had long been able to feel comfortable, in order to obtain a committed "friend," with which they had to know they were going to experience difficulties, remains an open, and potentially crucial, question.

One potential precipitating factor, mentioned at several points in this discussion, could have been a reorientation in what

might be termed Soviet grand strategy: their perceptions of the overall correlation of forces between Socialism and capitalism/imperialism, their assessments of Socialism's consequent freedom of action to support 'progressive forces' in the world, and their conclusions on how best to exploit that position.⁶⁸ If nothing else, Soviet actions in Angola, Ethiopia, and South Yemen provide reason to believe that their views on these questions have changed, and that these changes took place before the Afghanistan problem arose.*

Second, again assuming this analysis of Soviet motivations to be more accurate than not, and despite what was said immediately above, there is one respect in which the invasion does have predictive value. That concerns the future of the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. Having at considerable (and most likely continuing) cost to themselves taken direct action to avert impending disaster in Afghanistan, the Soviets are likely to continue that action until the forces impelling the DRA toward disaster have been eliminated. The problem they face is, essentially, that of constructing not only a new government for Afghanistan -- one its people will tolerate -- but also a new international posture for the country -- one both Afghanistan's neighbors and the Soviet Union's other adversaries will tolerate. Neither will be easy. Both will take time, more likely years than months. And until both are achieved, a significant Soviet military presence in Afghanistan will be required.

Third, how can the Soviets exploit their presence in Afghanistan? What of significance can they do now that they're there that they couldn't do when they weren't there?

In terms of direct military action, such as an attempt to interdict the oil flow from the Arab/Persian Gulf, the improvement

*The issue here is the amount of light this case sheds on what has been referred to rather loosely as "Soviet expansionism." Expansionism is not a particularly useful term, having no unambiguous empirical referent. It could denote Soviet desire to increase their influence in the international arena, or their planned establishment of control over other states, or even some program of extending the perimeter of the Soviet empire. It does, nevertheless, refer to something real, a phenomenon with which the rest of the world must come to grips. Afghanistan has experienced it. But at what point in the interventionary process described above was Soviet expansionism manifested? At the beginning, as argued here, or at the end, as other portrayals of the situation would have it? The issue is important.

in their position seems to be marginal at best.* In terms of indirect military-political action, on the other hand, their position seems to have improved substantially.

Denying values to the West, or acquiring them for themselves -- command of the Arabian Sea, or Middle East oil, for example -- may be judged by the Soviets to be close to, if not within, the realm of feasibility.** If that is the case, however, such steps can only be undertaken with reasonable assurance of success once the theater of action" has been "prepared". And the Soviets tend not to move until "favorable conditions" have been established.⁶⁹

One potentially rewarding preparatory move could be the establishment of a greater Baluchi state, beholden to the Soviet Union not only for its birth but for its continued existence. Could such indebtedness then be translated into the ability to operate their naval and air forces from Baluchi territory, the Soviets would be in a far better position to attempt realization of larger ambitions.

If Soviet actions in Afghanistan presage an attempt on their part to acquire such a position in Baluchistan, covert, largely political action is liable to be their first resort, and overt military action, an invasion, their last resort. In the abstract, the latter is, of course, made more feasible by virtue of their occupation of Afghanistan. So, however, is the former. And the former, if successful, can be effected at significantly lower cost and risk.

*To the extent that such operations would require use of Afghan facilities (say, for staging tactical aircraft) and until the rebellion has been extinguished, there may be no such improvement. As of now (November 1980), as a base of operations, Afghanistan still cannot be considered secure.

**A judgment of this nature easily could have resulted from a shift in the Soviet evaluation of the correlation of forces.

APPENDIX: OTHER, LESS PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

No simple answer to the question of why the Soviets invaded Afghanistan can be considered satisfactory. Their behavior must be considered the product of at least three factors:

- the demands of the situation itself,
- their objectives in the situation, and
- their long-range goals.

Even this is an oversimplification since it omits consideration of the dynamics of Soviet policy formulation and implementation.

This section outlines the potential explanations of the invasion that have been advanced. With one exception, these explanations are offered here without evaluative comments; evaluations are presented in the following section. That exception -- purported changes in the Soviet leadership -- is the only case in which sufficient evidence has by now acculated to permit its dismissal outright.

EXPLANATIONS

Changes in the Soviet Leadership

Reliable information on internal Soviet politics and processes is sparse. What has been revealed about the functioning of the Soviet policy process during the period leading up to the invasion shows no evidence of significant anomalies. After the invasion, however, speculation arose that structural changes in the Soviet leadership had occurred in November-December 1979, producing a fundamental shift in the character of Soviet external behavior -- specifically, that General Secretary Brezhnev and his supporters had been outvoted in the Politburo by proponents of a more aggressive foreign policy. That speculation now appears unwarranted.⁷⁰ The evidence clearly shows that Brezhnev & Co. had control when the decision to invade was taken and retain it now.

Continuity in the composition of the leadership implies continuity in the definitions of the situation and appropriate policies that prevailed in Soviet councils; it does not, however, necessitate it. Views on the course of events in Afghanistan and how, specifically, the Soviet Union should react to those developments are not at issue here. What is of concern is the Soviets' net assessment of their freedom to act in the international arena, and their inclination to exploit that freedom. There is reason to believe that their views on these questions have indeed undergone change. But those changes appear to have taken place several

years in advance of the invasion and cannot be considered to have triggered it.⁷¹

Ruling out organizational or perceptual change in the Soviet leadership as an explanation for the invasion refocuses attention on developments in the leadership's relevant environment. In this case that means developments in the Soviet Union itself, in Afghanistan, in Soviet-Afghan relations, in relations between Afghanistan and its other neighbors, and in the behavior of the major extra-regional powers.

Internal Situation

Domestic considerations could have played a role in the Soviet decision to invade Afghanistan. They faced two potential internal problems. One was religious in origin, the other ethnic. The foreseeable consequences of either becoming an actuality were significant: destabilization, weakening of the central authority's control over peripheral areas, and, if not checked, eventual disintegration of the entire system.

As is well known, the Soviet Union has a large -- and growing -- Muslim minority.⁷² Given the fundamentalist, anti-modernist militancy that increasingly had come to characterize Islam, had just brought down the Shah, and was contributing to the rebellion that gripped Afghanistan, the existence of this minority gave the Soviet leadership ample grounds for concern. Islamic disaffection was rife across the border. It appeared infectious, and there was little in the history of Soviet treatment either of religious questions or of its minorities to provide effective antibodies against it -- quite the contrary.

Secondly, Afghanistan and the Soviet Republics on its border share populations.⁷³ Until relatively recently, migrant and nomadic peoples moved freely throughout the area. When the present border was drawn, and closed, it divided these peoples -- Turkoman, Uzbek, Tajik, and Kirghiz -- into Soviets and Afghans. Ethnic, tribal, even family, ties were not so readily severed, however, and strong cross-border affinities remained. When the Soviet system was imposed on the northern side of the border in the 1920s, many of those people resisted. When that resistance was suppressed, a process that lasted into the 1930s, large numbers sought refuge with their "brothers" in Afghanistan. Rebellion on the southern side of the border could well bring them, and their resistance, back to the Soviet Union.

On both counts, and for their own purposes, the Soviets consequently had a serious interest in the restoration of order in Afghanistan. Occupying the country was the potentially most effective way to insure this was accomplished.

External Situation

Although ultimately the product of the relationships that had developed between the Soviet government and its citizenry, the immediate origins of those potential internal difficulties lay outside the Soviet Union. Some were to be found in Afghanistan itself; others came from further afield, with Afghanistan serving as the medium of their possible transmission into the Soviet Union. The international arena consequently provided what may with some confidence be judged to have represented the more important focus of Soviet concern.

Impending Collapse of a Neighboring, Friendly Regime

Developments both within Afghanistan and in Afghan-Soviet relations have been covered in depth in the main body of the discussion. The argument that the direction taken by those developments explains the Soviets' actions does not need to be repeated here.

Actions by The Regional Powers

Three countries in addition to the Soviet Union share borders with Afghanistan: Iran, Pakistan, and China. Any or all of them could have provided the stimulus to the Soviet invasion.

Their provision of logistic and other support to the Afghan rebels could have elicited such a response, and in fact such a charge did serve as the fundamental rationale put forward officially by the Soviets to explain their action. As the Soviets depicted the situation, although involving local anti-progressive forces (religious zealots, disgruntled former landowners, usurers, etc.), the rebellion in Afghanistan was essentially the creature of regional reaction and international imperialism: counterrevolution from without. Under the circumstances, preserving the gains of the Afghan revolution required sealing the country's borders. And, given the demonstrated inability of the Afghan military to accomplish that, Soviet assistance was required.⁷⁴

While its dimensions remain ill-defined, there is no doubt that support was in fact provided Afghan rebels through both Iran and Pakistan. In the former case, it appears to have occurred primarily in the early stages of the rebellion and to have been limited in scope.

The assistance provided the Afghan rebels through Pakistan obviously has been of far greater significance. It began early, and it continues. In excess of half a million Afghan refugees have sought safety in Pakistan. Many of them subsequently exploited that sanctuary as a base from which to undertake anti-regime operations.

Who supplied the weapons, munitions, and funds the rebels reportedly acquired in Pakistan is not clear. Some may have come from the West. Some may have come from China. Some may have come from Pakistan itself. At what point in the course of events that flow began -- in particular, how much support was being provided in the period leading up to the Soviet invasion -- is not clear either.

Although even less readily defined and documented, a somewhat similar stimulus to the Soviet invasion could have been provided by attempts on the part of its more anti-Soviet neighbors to entice the Afghan government away from its pro-Soviet orientation. The Shah had made just such an attempt with Mohammad Daoud in the mid-1970s (interpreted subsequently as one of the reasons for Daoud's downfall, and for some sort of Soviet participation in that action).⁷⁵ Although there is no evidence that they actually did it, had China made similar overtures to Hafizullah Amin, and had those overtures found a sympathetic reception with him, Soviet paranoia concerning the Chinese might well have provided the impetus required for the invasion.

Desire for the Region's Resources

An entirely different set of potential incentives for the invasion was also to be found in the region. These lay not in others' actions -- to which the Soviets would have been responding -- but in others' possessions -- which the Soviets might covet. One of those possessions is strategic location; the other is oil. The former could serve as a stepping stone to the latter.

There is no doubt that, could access to them be acquired and preserved at reasonable cost, the Soviets would like to be able to operate their naval and air forces from bases located on the northern littoral of the Arabian Sea: Gwadar in western Pakistan, for example, or Chah Bahar in eastern Iran. Either could serve as the "warm water port" the Tsars traditionally were held to be, and the Soviets obviously are, seeking in the region.* Seizing Afghanistan could be an important step in that direction. Once having consolidated their position in Afghanistan, the Soviets might be able to exploit local separatist sentiments to create out of the Baluchi areas of Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan -- and having created to protect -- a new, and appropriately thankful, littoral state.⁷⁶

*Which is not to say either that the objectives of the two have been the same, or that they would have used an Indian Ocean port in the same way. The Soviets have for some time now concentrated on acquiring overflight rights and access to local facilities -- required if they are to support their peacetime presence and routine operations in the region efficiently.

The ability to base naval and air forces in that area would put the Soviets in a position to dominate the approaches to the Arab/Persian Gulf.* Were their ultimate objective the seizure of oil fields inside the Gulf, even if they intended something far less dramatic (and dangerous), like assuming the role of "protector" of one or more of the oil producing states there, being in a position to control movement into and out of the Gulf could give them a commanding advantage.

The Soviets may, or may not, desire guaranteed access to Arab/Persian Gulf oil.⁷⁷ Even if they don't need it, which they might, they may want to divert some or all of it away from its current primary recipients: the United States and its allies in Europe and Asia. Even if they don't want to do that, they might think it useful to threaten such action -- or to be seen to be in a position to threaten it. The possibilities are manifold.

Assigning probabilities to those options is, at this point, a near impossibility. The situation simply has not yet developed far enough to provide a basis for making such judgments responsibly.**

Should the Soviets have such actions in mind, however, the post-revolutionary chaos in Iran represents another convenient and potentially fruitful (although once again dangerous) opportunity for exploitation. And Afghanistan could have been seen as a potential route into Iran, either directly, through overt military action, or indirectly, through covert "political" action. In either case, firm Soviet or reliable surrogate control of Afghanistan was clearly a precondition.

Countering Western and Chinese Actions in the Region

There are only two extra-regional powers both willing and able to undertake the kind of direct action in Southwest Asia that could affect Soviet interests significantly: the United States, by air and sea, and China, over land. The Soviets, rightly, view both as hostile. And, rightly or wrongly, the Soviets view both

*Much more would be required for this than the limited overflight rights and access to facilities sustaining routine "presence" operations. A full-scale combat support infrastructure would have to be developed, and substantial provision made for its defense.

**Until the uncertainty surrounding current estimates of their net oil requirements is reduced significantly, or they make some significant move in that direction, attempting to forecast Soviet efforts to gain control of Middle East oil will remain largely an exercise in speculation.

as attempting to expand their own activities in and influence over the area, success at which could jeopardize Soviet interests there. As a result, the Soviets are inclined to oppose any action by either that they consider to be an attempt to penetrate the area. Two such actions, one undertaken by China, the other by the United States, preceded the Soviet invasion.

The first of these was the opening in 1978-79 of the Karakorum highway across the Pamirs, linking China and Pakistan and making direct Chinese military support of Pakistan feasible. Soviet paranoia regarding China has already been mentioned in connection with the provision of support to Afghan rebels in Pakistan. The existence of the highway made not only the potential scope of that support, but the risks the Soviets might run in attempting to suppress it (conflict not only with the Pakistanis but with the Chinese), very great indeed.

The second action that preceded the invasion and could have been seen by the Soviets as a penetration attempt was the December 1979 positioning by the United States of a large naval task force in the Arabian Sea. Neither the character nor the outcome of U.S.-Iranian interchange over the hostage diplomats was then foreseeable. U.S. influence over Iran had been reduced sharply when the Shah was forced out. However, as order failed to emerge from the ensuing chaos, Iran's ability to ward off military intervention declined perceptably; and, viewed from the Soviet perspective, as U.S. patience wore thin, the likelihood that it might attempt a repetition of the action it had taken there in 1953 increased. A strong Soviet position in Afghanistan might or might not deter such action. At the minimum, however, it would serve to limit its impact.

Retaliation for Western Actions Outside the Region

Attempts to penetrate the area are not the only actions by extra-regional powers that might have triggered the Soviet invasion. The Western powers -- the United States, Europe and Japan -- had in the period leading up to the invasion taken a number of steps clearly viewed by the Soviets as inimical to their more general interests. The United States and Japan had begun to "play the China card." The United States and its European allies had decided to modernize NATO theater nuclear forces. And the United States was not making visible headway in ratifying the SALT II Treaty. There was little the Soviets could do to retaliate directly for these actions. Indirect retaliation was not, however, precluded.

All of the Western powers share the same vital interest in the region: the uninterrupted flow of oil out of the Persian Gulf. A direct threat to the interest obviously entailed great risks. An indirect threat to the oil flow, on the other hand,

could have been seen as an appropriate measure of indirect retaliation.

Moreover, an indirect move, of appropriately murky origins and ill-defined consequences, was likely to be perceived differently by different Western powers. And an opportunity of that nature, which could be exploited to enhance the divisiveness already manifest within the Western Alliance, might have been difficult for the Soviets to pass up.

EVALUATIONS

The essence of the argument presented in the main body of the discussion was that, for the Soviets, Afghanistan represented the proverbial "tar baby." Once having grasped it, they could not let go of it (without running unacceptable risk). There is, of course, no direct evidence to support this argument. Reasoning from the course of events that led up to the invasion and the circumstances in which those events occurred produced this argument and provides its support.

The same reasoning can be applied to other potential explanations. Their evaluation here is conducted primarily on this basis.

As indicated earlier, there is direct evidence that the invasion was not the result of alterations in the personnel structure or political constellation of the Soviet leadership. No such alterations took place. Brezhnev & Co. remain in position, and in charge. And, while there are indications that the Soviets now view the international situation in a manner significantly different from that prevailing as late as, say, 1976, this change in perception cannot be considered the stimulus to the invasion.⁷⁸

Domestic considerations, especially concern for the potential infection of the Soviet Union's Muslim minority with Islamic fervor, probably did play a role in Soviet decision-making during this period. But such concern is far more likely to have been a conditioning than a determining factor in their decision to intervene. Militant fundamentalism, while widespread throughout the Muslim world, was most intense among the Shiites. The Shiites are concentrated in Iran. To the extent that their fervor threatened the USSR, it did so directly across the Soviet-Iranian border, not indirectly via Afghanistan. The Iranian Islamic revolution spread into, but not throughout, Afghanistan.* Had the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan occurred at the time of the Herat revolt, fear of Islam easily could have been its principal explanation. But it

*Afghanistan's geographical and ethnic fragmentation would have made that difficult. The country's overwhelming Hanafi Sunni orientation made it unlikely.

did not. It occurred nine months after Herat. And in the meantime other, potentially far more significant events had taken place in Afghanistan.

Those events have been outlined in the main body of the discussion. The contributions of other potential stimuli should, however, be given their due.

Most of the latter will receive short shrift. They deserve it, either because they are not necessary to an otherwise sufficient explanation of the invasion or because, to the extent the invasion could have represented a response to one or another of them, it would not only have been a disproportionate response, but inexplicably so.

The first such consideration to be dismissed here is Iranian, Pakistani or Chinese support to the Afghan rebels. It is not needed to explain adequately on the one hand either the origin, scope or intensity of the rebellion or on the other hand the threat the rebellion posed to the Afghan revolution. Indigenous explanations suffice. External support to the rebels provided the Soviets a convenient rationalization for their actions, but it is not credible as a justification.*

External enticements to the Afghan leadership to abandon the revolution and steer the country toward the non-Socialist (Western, or Chinese) camp are also readily dismissed.** They are not necessary to explain the DRA's inability to prevent, and having failed to prevent to suppress, the rebellion. Moreover, in contrast to the case of former President Daoud, there are no indications that such enticements were in fact offered to DRA leaders.⁷⁹

It seems highly unlikely that the actions of extra-regional powers -- including the Chinese construction of the Karakorum highway and the U.S. reaction to Iran's seizure of its diplomats -- could have stimulated the invasion. In the former case, the

*Given their ideology, the provisions of their treaty with Afghanistan, and their obvious interest in deflecting the criticism the invasion was bound to engender, it is not surprising that the Soviets attempted to depict the operation as directed against external forces.

**The same applies to a variant of this explanation. Although it is difficult to believe he would have attempted it, or that such an attempt would have succeeded, the Soviets could have feared that, in order to remain in power, Amin -- on his own -- might try to return Afghanistan to its pre-revolutionary position. Worse, he might try to align it with the West.

timing is at best inappropriate.* In both cases, to have responded by invading Afghanistan would have represented a "punishment" that "fit" neither the "criminal" nor "the crime." This is not to deny Soviet paranoia concerning either the United States or China, which in the case of the latter is obviously intense, but merely to downgrade the probability that irrationality played a significant role in the conception of what was in all other respects a carefully planned and reasonably well executed move.

The explanations examined immediately above presuppose that in invading Afghanistan the Soviets were responding to the actions of others. There remains, however, a second family of potential explanations, resting on the opposite assumption: that the invasion represented a Soviet initiative.

Two such potential explanations were addressed earlier. One posited a Soviet interest in the acquisition of strategic position on the northern littoral of the Arabian Sea. The other prospective acquisition was guaranteed access (on whatever terms) to Middle East oil.

Pursuit of either objective could have produced the invasion -- as a first step in the appropriate direction. Neither explanation can be ruled out at this point. However, granting credence to one or the other would require positive results from two assessments, neither of which can be made without excessive reliance on speculation. One is that the Soviets had sufficient incentive to initiate the move; the other is that they perceived the deterrents to such action as insufficient. There is no convincing evidence in the steps they have taken thus far in Afghanistan, or in their discussions of this or related issues or in their behavior elsewhere, to suggest that the incentive-disincentive balance liable to trigger an attempt to implement such a grandiose scheme has, in fact, been reached.⁸⁰

*The highway was opened formally in August 1978. Traffic did not begin moving on it, however, until June 1979.

NOTES

1. For what is widely considered to be an encyclopedic, if not definitive, description of the country and its history, see: Louis Dupree, Afghanistan, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973, 1978, 1980 (Each of the later editions contains a postscript updating the discussion of the current political situation). For a concise treatment of British-Russian interaction in Afghanistan, see: David Fromkin, "The Great Game in Asia," Foreign Affairs 58-4 (Spring 1980), pp. 936-951.
2. Robert G. Neumann [U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, 1966-1973], "Afghanistan Under the Red Flag," in: Z. Michael Szaz (ed.), The Impact of the Iranian Events Upon Persian Gulf & United States Security, Washington, DC, The American Foreign Policy Institute, 1979, pp. 128-148.
3. Dupree, op. cit. See Also: Louis Dupree and Linette Albert (eds.), Afghanistan in the 1970s, New York and London, Praeger Publishers (Praeger special studies in international economics and development), 1974.
4. This characterization of Afghan society as "peasant-tribal" is Dupree's.
5. Christine F. Ridout, "Authority Patterns and the Afghan Coup of 1973," The Middle East Journal, 29-2 (Spring 1975), pp. 165-178.
6. Allegations of Soviet involvement were made at the time. Their origins lay in the Soviet-oriented backgrounds of the military figures involved in these events and the open support given the Daoud regime by (some of) the Marxists. Subsequent analyses cast doubt on those allegations. See: Neumann, op. cit., and Shaheen F. Dil, "The Cabal in Kabul: Great Power Interaction in Afghanistan," American Political Science Review, 71-2 (June 1977), pp. 468-476.
7. As will be noted in the discussion, allegations of direct Soviet participation in the April 1978 coup center on the nationality of the pilots who flew decisive air strikes against the strongholds of Daoud's presidential guard. Qualified observers -- apparently Western military attaches -- reportedly concluded that the proficiency demonstrated by those pilots surpassed that of the Afghan Air Force and could only be attributed to the Soviets. This question is discussed in: Neumann, op. cit. See also: Hannah Negaran (pseudonym), "The Afghan Coup of April 1978: Revolution and International Security," Orbis 23-1 (Spring 1979), pp. 93-113.

8. This discussion is based, except as noted, on Dupree's treatment of the period, which is sympathetic to Daoud (probably more so than deserved).
9. Further to note 8, Dupree says Daoud resigned. Others say he was fired.
10. Dil, op. cit.
11. Ibid. and Stephen Oren, "The Afghani Coup and the Peace of the Northern Tier," The World Today 30-4 (January 1974), pp. 26-32.
12. This observation is Dupree's, and can be characterized as (at least one of) the most astute of the political judgments in his several discussions of contemporary Afghanistan.
13. Oren, op. cit., Hannah Negaran (pseudonym) "Afghanistan: A Marxist Regime in a Muslim Society," Current History 76-446 (April 1979), pp. 172-175.
14. Little was published about Afghan foreign policy during the period of Daoud's presidency. Major events were, of course, reported as they occurred. Most analyses of the subject, and they are few in number, are retrospective, written after (some obviously because) Daoud was overthrown (many of their judgments consequently being suspect). One welcome exception is: A.H.H. Abidi, "Irano-Afghan Dispute Over the Helmand Waters," International Studies (New Delhi) 16-3 (July-September 1977), pp. 357-378.
15. CIA, Communist Aid to Less Developed Countries of the Free World, 1975, ER 76-10372U, July 1976, p. 33. CIA, Changing Patterns in Soviet-LDC Trade, 1976-77, ER 78-10326, May 1978, pp. 10, 11.
16. Many observers have noted that, after 1976, Daoud began moving in domestic affairs to the right and in international affairs away from the Soviet Union, without pinpointing either the origin(s) of the shift or the factors that led to its continuation (if not acceleration). Selig Harrison (in: "The Shah, not Kremlin, Touched Off Afghan Coup," The Washington Post, 13 May 1979, pp. C1, 5) attributes this -- not especially convincingly -- to the influence of the Shah. DRA spokesmen -- no more convincingly -- said the same. Since the Shah promised a lot but delivered little, that answer appears too easy. The question deserves explicit study, if only because of the light it might throw on the Soviet volte-face on Afghanistan.
17. Summary accounts of the coup are contained in: Louis Dupree, "Afghanistan Under the Khalq," Problems of Communism 28-4

(July-August 1979), pp. 34-50, and Richard S. Newell, "Revolution and Revolt in Afghanistan," The World Today 35-11 (November 1979), pp. 432-442.

18. The characterization is Dupree's.
19. Neumann, op. cit.
20. Taraki discussed the immediate origins of the coup in a June 1978 interview with the Kabul correspondent of Die Zeit, Andreas Kohlschuetter [translated in: FBIS, Daily Report: Middle East & North Africa, V-112 (9 June 1978), pp. S1-5]. For a detailed and apparently more-or-less objective Soviet account of (some of) these events, based on an interview with Amin, see: Alexander Ignatov, "Afghanistan: Three Months of the Revolution," New Times (Moscow) 35-78 (August 1978), pp. 27-30. Sri Prakash Sinha, Der Spiegel's South Asia correspondent, has produced a much different account, in which the Soviets are depicted as having played a leading role in the initiation of the events depicted. See his Afghanistan in Aufruhr (Afghanistan in Turmoil), Freiburg and Zurich: Hecht Verlag, 1980.
21. The most prominent was then Colonel (he had been promoted, and demoted, by Daoud) Abdul Qader. He commanded the Bagram Air Base at the time of the 1973 palace revolt. Daoud first made him Air Force Chief-of-Staff, then sent him off to be director of military slaughterhouses. After the April 1978 coup, the PDPA made him Minister of Defense, then jailed him. As of May 1980, he had been rehabilitated once again by the current regime. For his involvement in the events described, see: Dupree, "Afghanistan Under the Khalq," op. cit.
22. See note 11.
23. Radio Kabul, 29 April 1978, in: FBIS, Daily Report: Middle East & North America, V-84 (1 May 1978), p. S2.
24. Radio Kabul, 30 April 1978, in: ibid., p. S1.
25. The literature on the PDPA is anything but extensive. Dupree has discussed it at some length (see his "Afghanistan Under the Khalq, op. cit."). Fred Halliday appears to be unusually well informed on the subject. Much of the information presented here on the party, its principals, and its actions, is drawn from two of the latter's articles: "Revolution in Afghanistan," New Left Review (London), No. 112 (1978), pp. 3-44, and "Afghanistan -- A Revolution Consumes Itself," The Nation 229-16 (17 November 1979), pp. 492-495. A politically more balanced discussion is presented in: Newell, op. cit.

26. See Neumann, op. cit., for the Soviet connection. Characterizations of the programmatic stances of Parcham and Khalq differ widely. Contradictions abound. Each is, at various times and by various observers, judged the more "hard line" or "subservient to Moscow." The terms used here reflect both Halliday's discussions and the reported behavior of the two groups (on the theory that actions speak at least as loudly as words).
27. Khalq represented the mainstream PDPA, the other factions having split-off since the organization's establishment in 1965. Dupree ("Afghanistan Under the Khalq," op. cit.) presents a reasonably detailed history of this fractionation.
28. Halliday ("Revolution in Afghanistan," op. cit.) and Dupree ("Afghanistan Under the Khalq," op. cit.) describe the Maoist splinters.
29. See ibid. for the ethnic and social backgrounds of Khalq and Parcham.
30. Halliday ("Revolution in Afghanistan," op. cit.) has the most to say about Taraki.
31. Newell (op. cit.) outlines Amin's administrative background most completely (among other things, he did graduate work in school administration at Columbia University).
32. Dupree ("Afghanistan Under the Khalq," op. cit.) has the most to say about Karmal.
33. Disagreement on when and why -- and in particular at whose initiative -- Parcham and Khalq agreed to cooperate is sharp. Dupree intimates that it occurred in July of 1977 at Karmal's initiative ("Afghanistan Under the Khalq," op. cit., p. 41); Halliday states ("Revolution in Afghanistan," op. cit., p. 31) that it took two years and outside -- Pakistani Communist -- mediation. He gives the same date as Dupree for the conclusion of the process, however. Newell, (op. cit., p. 435) cites Daoud's repressions and Soviet encouragement as the stimuli to the reunification, but dates it only to 1977. Negaran ("The Afghan Coup..., op. cit., p. 100) references a report ("Kabul Coup: Surprise for Moscow?," Events, No. 45, 16 June 1978, p. 26) that "reconciliation took place in May 1977 in New Delhi, possibly with the help of the Indian Communist Party." He/she, by indirect argument, supports speculation that the Soviet Union was involved. Neumann's reference (op. cit., p. 135) to the same report is more emphatic: "There is every reason to believe that this 'unity' was pushed, if not forced, by the Soviet Union."

34. Dupree ("Afghanistan Under the Khalq," op. cit.) presents a breakdown of cabinet members by factional affiliation.
35. Dupree, ibid., (probably correctly) attributes this purge to a Khalqi attempt to reduce the power of "Nationalist-Muslim" factions.
36. For an obviously well-informed description of this contest, see: Alexandre Dastarac and M. Levent, "Afghan Nationalities Aroused," Le Monde Diplomatique (Paris) (February 1980), pp. 6, 7 [translated in: Near East/North Africa Report No. 2093, JPRS 75352, 21 March 1980, pp. 6-20].
37. For a perceptive journalistic account of these events, see: Jean Francois Lemounier, Hong Kong AFP in English, 1 August 1979, in: FBIS, Daily Report: Middle East & North Africa, V-150 (2 August 1979), pp. S1, 2.
38. Halliday ("Afghanistan -- A Revolution Consumes Itself," op. cit.); Dastarac and Levent, op. cit.
39. Ibid. See also: Lemounier, op. cit., and Barry Shlachter, "Shootout in Kabul," The Guardian (London) 1 October 1979, p. 1.
40. R. Ul'yanovskiy, "Countries With a Socialist Orientation," Kommunist (Moscow), No. 11 (July 1979), pp. 114-123 [translated in: USSR Report -- Translations From Kommunist No. 11 July 1979, JPRS 74317, 4 October 1979, pp. 130-140].
41. In an interesting analysis of the military's contribution to the Soviet decision to intervene, Der Spiegel cites the March and April mutinies in Herat and Jalalabad as initial stimuli, and General Yepishev's visit as a preparatory step, noting that both he and General Pavlovsky, who followed him to Afghanistan in August, had made similar trips to Czechoslovakia in advance of the Soviet's 1968 intervention. See: "Moskaus Griff nach Afghanistan (Moscow's Grab for Afghanistan)," Der Spiegel 34-1/2 (7 January 1980), pp. 71-88.
42. For an example of the "advice," see: Ul'yanovskiy, op. cit. For the embassy officers' activities, see: Lemounier, op. cit., and Salamat Ali, "Accepting the Limits of Aid," Far Eastern Economic Review, 105-35 (31 August 1979), pp. 27, 28.
43. Various, and varying, accounts of these events have been published. The one by Dastarac and Levent (op. cit.) is more detailed (and perhaps more accurate) than most. See also Sinha, op. cit., pp. 57-61.

44. Representative (retrospective) Soviet commentaries on the antecedents of their decision to invade are summarized in: Theo Sommer, "Der Kreml glaubt den Traenen nicht: Wie die Sowjets in die afghanische Zwickmuehle gerieten-die Version moskaus (The Kremlin Doesn't Believe the Tears: How the Soviets Got Into the Afghan Predicament -- Moscow's Version)," Die Zeit (Hamburg) 35-14 (4 April 1980), p. 3.
45. Dating the Soviet decision to invade is, of course, extraordinarily difficult, not least because it probably occurred incrementally -- in stages, over an extended period -- and incorporated decisions: (1) that the situation in Afghanistan required Soviet action, (2) that military force was the most appropriate instrument to use, (3) that a plan for its use should be developed and the requisite preparations made, and (4) that the operation should begin. General Yepishev's visit could have contributed to the first of those decisions; General Pavlovsky's to the second and third. The fourth could have taken place as early as late November (see Hough, op. cit.) or early December (U.S. Department of State, "Afghanistan: Soviet Invasion Attacked in U.N.," Current Policy No. 124, 6 January 1980; Don Oberdorfer, "The Making of a Soviet Coup," The Washington Post, 2 January 1980, pp. 1, 2); Sinha, op. cit., especially pp. 63-72.
46. For an illuminating interchange on this subject, see: the Kohlschuetter interview with Taraki (op. cit.) in which the following interchange is recorded:

Zeit: How Communist is the [PDPA]?

Taraki: There is no Communist Party in our country....

Zeit: Would you call your party Marxist?

Taraki: We consider ourselves to be radical reformers and progressive democrats. Marxism-Leninism is not a formula which we apply or claim. Just read our party program and judge for yourself.

Zeit: At the moment this program is unobtainable. All foreign embassies are desparately trying to get a copy.

Taraki: Unfortunately, I left it at home today....

47. The author has been able to locate only one systematic analysis of the structure and functions of the Socialist Commonwealth: Vernon V. Aspaturian, "The Metamorphosis of the Socialist Commonwealth," in: Horn, Schwan and Weingartner (eds.), Sozialismus in Theorie und Praxis, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1978, pp. 247-320.

48. James McConnell differentiates between risks of crisis and risks of war. Most examinations of Soviet risk-taking have focused on the latter. The former should receive equivalent attention.
49. Both the PDPA and the Soviets were very careful with the language they used to describe the revolution -- at least in its early stages. All references to its Socialist character were implicit. After the signature of their December 1978 treaty, such references became much less implicit. In the course of 1979, as Amin took over and the revolution faltered, PDPA spokesmen went to great lengths to identify their cause with that of Socialism. After the March 1979 Herat revolt, Soviet spokesmen went to equally great lengths to downplay that identification. For an example of the rapidity of the latter change, compare the following: Leonid Teplinsky, "Afghanistan: The People Defend Their Revolution," New Times (Moscow) 14-79 (April 1979), pp. 10, 11; G. Anatolyev, "Afghanistan: Upholding Independence," New Times (Moscow), 34-79 (August 1979), pp. 8, 9.
50. Radio Kabul, 2 October 1979, in: FBIS, Daily Report: Middle East & North Africa, V-195 (5 October 1979), p. S2.
51. That they were aware of, on the one hand what they were about to undertake, and on the other the reaction it might stimulate, is clear. Taraki and Amin both discussed the question with the press. See, for example, their respective interviews with Kohlschuetter and Ignatov (op. cit.). In addition, see Amin's press conference, broadcast on 5 April 1979 by Radio Kabul, in which inter alia he states: "I do not have any anxiety of the speed with we are moving...." FBIS, Daily Report: Middle East & North Africa, V-70 (10 April 1979), pp. S2-5.
52. In April 1979, Taraki reported on the major initiatives undertaken in the first year of the revolution. See: "Great Leader Reports on One Year Activity," Kabul Times (Kabul), 30 April 1979, pp. 1, 2 in: FBIS, Daily Report: Middle East & North Africa, V-97 (17 May 1979), pp. S1-5.
53. Initially, resistance to the regime was held to be confined to "internal, radical, black reaction," which was "composed mainly of the Ekhwanis [common term for the Moslem brotherhood],...opposing [the] revolution under the mask of religion...." Press conference by Taraki, broadcast by Radio Kabul, 21 September 1978, in: FBIS, Daily Report: Middle East & North Africa, V-190 (29 September 1978), pp. S1-4.
54. See note 51. See also Taraki's speech, broadcast 30 April 1979 by Radio Kabul, in: FBIS, Daily Report: Middle East & North Africa, V-97 (17 May 1979), p. S1.

55. Ridout (op. cit.).
56. A comprehensive description of the Herat revolt has not been published. Most Western reporting is fragmentary and (at best) second hand. The DRA said little about the revolt, other than charging that it had been instigated by Iran and reporting that it had been put down by the Afghan Army. The latter was certainly accurate; the former may have been. For the flavor of the Western reporting, see: Christopher Dobson, "Russians Massacred in Riot by Afghan Fanatics," The Sunday Telegraph (London), 15 April 1979, p. 2.
57. How many Soviets were killed is not clear. The DRA admitted one. Soviet sources have admitted 40-50. The actual figure may be several times the latter. It included men, women and children. Atrocities of the worst sort were committed. See (if you must) ibid.
58. Sinha (op. cit., p. 135) cites a May 1978 incident as the beginning of the resistance. Newell (op. cit.) dates the beginning to the summer of 1978, indicating that it remained localized (primarily in Badakshan and Nuristan) until late in the year. In "Afghanistan Under the Khalq" (op. cit.), Dupree states that it began in the fall of 1978, after the crops were in. According to reports from Pakistan, refugees began arriving shortly after the April 1978 coup, and the flow continued steadily until September of that year, when it escalated sharply. AFP in English, 24 September 1978, in: FBIS, Daily Report: Middle East & North Africa, V-187 (26 September 1978), p. S1.
59. Dastarac and Levent (op. cit.) note that, after the Herat and Jalalabad mutinies in March and April 1979, in which locally-raised forces apparently refused to take action against their "brothers," the army was largely disarmed and confined to its barracks.
60. They first appeared in the 1950s, their numbers rising and falling and roles changing over the years. Prior to the coup, there were, perhaps, 1500 -- of whom some 350 were military and the remainder civilian. For a representative estimate, see: U.S. Department of State, Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, Special Report No. 70, April 1980, p. 1.
61. Authoritative estimates show that by the end of the year those pre-coup figures had doubled to 700 military and 2200 civilian. See: CIA, Communist Aid Activities in Non-Communist Less Developed Countries: 1978, ER 79-10412U, September 1979, pp. 5, 15. The press was reporting even sharper increases -- e.g., about 1500 military "advisers and technicians" by October. See: Michael Richardson, "Enlarging the Soviet Camp," Far Eastern Economic Review 102-41, 13 October 1978, pp. 20, 21.

62. A comprehensive discussion of the activities of Soviet advisors in Afghanistan has not yet appeared. The Western press carried numerous reports on the subject, most quoting "informed sources." An example is: Bruce Loudon, "Russians Take Key Posts in Afghan Army and State," The Daily Telegraph (London), 7 August 1979, p. 5.
63. Ibid.
64. The negative impact of the Soviet presence is readily noted in the statements of Afghan defectors, both civil servants and military, who left the country and were interviewed extensively by the Western press in Pakistan.
65. Moscow TASS in English, 5 December 1978, in: FBIS, Daily Report: Soviet Union III-235 (6 December 1978), pp. J10-13.
66. Charles Petersen provided these insights on the levels of commitment manifested in the treaties.
67. What could well be an accurate depiction of the calculations that led the Soviets to act is contained in a statement to the editors of L'Unita (Milan) by academician Ye. M. Primakov, Director of the Soviet Academy of Sciences' Institute of Oriental Studies, and Aleksandr Bovin, Political Commentator of Izvestiya. In essence, they say the USSR was faced with the alternatives of counterrevolution or intervention in Afghanistan -- and could not have acted other than it did. See: FBIS, Daily Report: Soviet Union, III-057 (2 May 1980), pp. D4-D6. A similar although more bellicose statement was made at roughly the same time by the Soviet Ambassador to France, S.V. Chervonenko. See: Flora Lewis, "Kremelin's European Policy...", The New York Times, 22 April 1980, p. A14.
68. These concepts and their operationalization by the Soviets are discussed in: Robert G. Weinland, "The Employment of the Soviet Navy in Peace and War: Some Rationales (and Some Rationalizations)" in: George H. Quester (ed.), Navies and Arms Control, New York: Praeger, 1980, pp. 101-122.
69. These judgments should be considered in the context in which they were made. One aspect of that context is imperfect knowledge. Another is a set of implicit assumptions, drawn from the work of Nathan Leites and Alexander George on the Bolshevik/Soviet "operational code," regarding the way the Soviets tend to arrive at, and implement, policy decisions of this magnitude -- which is: carefully, with a sophisticated appreciation of both the magnitude and the imminence of the risk involved, and with a graduated approach to their objective that incorporates fall-back positions. They tend not to

"go for broke." See: Alexander L. George, "The 'Operational Code': A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-making," International Studies Quarterly 13-2 (June 1969), pp. 190-222. See also: Raymond L. Garthoff, "On Estimating and Imputing Intentions," International Security 2-3 (Winter 1978), pp. 22-32.

70. Jerry F. Hough, "Why the Russians Invaded," The Nation 230-8 (March 1980), front cover and pp. 232-234.
71. For a (what could prove to be prescient) discussion of the complex of issues involved here, see: R. Judson Mitchell, "A New Brezhnev Doctrine: The Restructuring of International Relations," World Politics, 30-3 (April 1978), pp. 366-390. See also: Vernon V. Aspaturian, "Soviet Global Power and the Correlation of Forces," Problems of Communism, 29-3 (May-June 1980), pp. 1-18.
72. The problems posed to the Soviet Union by the existence of this minority have been treated extensively by Western (primarily European) Sovietologists. For a well-balanced, scholarly discussion, see: Alexandre Bennigsen, "Soviet Muslims and the World of Islam," Problems of Communism, 29-2 (March-April 1980), pp. 38-51. For a remarkably thorough journalistic discussion of the subject, see: "Sowjet-Asien: Jagd nach sicheren Grenzen (Soviet Asia: Hunt for Secure Borders)," Der Spiegel (Hamburg) 34-14 (31 March 1980), pp. 150-172.
73. The ethnic composition and life styles of the region's population are described in detail in: Dupree, op. cit., pp. 55-251.
74. The most authoritative Soviet statement on the subject was made by General Secretary Brezhnev in a 13 January 1980 front page "interview" in Pravda [translated in: FBIS, Daily Report: Soviet Union III-9 (14 January 1980), pp. A1-6].
75. Harrison, "The Shah..., op. cit.
76. For a general discussion of the greater Baluchistan question, see: Selig S. Harrison, "Nightmare in Baluchistan" Foreign Policy, No. 32, Fall 1978, pp. 136-160. For a more recent discussion, see two articles by William Branigan in The Washington Post: "Pakistan's Baluchis Distrust U.S. Aid" (8 February 1980, pp. A1, 20) and "Baluchi Harbor a Lure to Soviets" (9 February 1980, p. A11). For a provocative (more accurately, thought-provoking) strategic analysis, denigrating the military value of Baluchistan to the Soviets, see: Edward N. Luttwak, "After Afghanistan, What?," Commentary 69-4 (April 1980), pp. 40-49.

77. Herbert E. Meyer, "Why We Should Worry About the Soviet Energy Crunch," Fortune 101-4 (25 February 1980), pp. 82-88.
78. For an authoritative discussion of the Soviet modus operandi in the use of force in the Third World through 1976, see: Bradford Dismukes and James McConnell (eds.), Soviet Naval Diplomacy, New York and Oxford, Pergamon Press (Pergamon Policy Studies-37) 1979. My "The Employment of the Soviet Navy . . .," op. cit. is an attempt to examine some of the implications of the arguments presented in Soviet Naval Diplomacy -- in particular, those advanced by McConnell and dealing with the Soviet attitude toward the status quo. Neither the book nor that discussion comes to grips adequately with this issue. Moreover, to the extent the Soviet approach to the status quo has in fact changed (as events since 1976 suggest, but do not in and of themselves prove) their explanatory value is reduced.
79. This is as good a place as any to deal with the charge raised, after the invasion, by Babrak Karmal and the Soviets, that Hafizullah Amin was a CIA agent -- and, hence, needed no enticements to abandon the revolution. If he was (which isn't at all likely), he wasn't a good one, since (although an obvious loss for the Soviet Union) it is difficult to view the situation he created as a victory for the United States. At least the Soviets have had the decency to say that he was "objectively" a CIA agent -- meaning, regardless of whether he was or wasn't, his actions had the consequences one would expect if he had been.
80. Note 69 applies here as well.

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